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Breaking Perceptions of "Old Boys' Networks": Women Leaders Learning to Make the Most of Mentoring Relationships

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Women often perceive a disadvantage over similarly qualified males in professional advancement because they are not part of the "old boys' network." Based upon the assumption that women and minorities struggle to gain access into educational administration positions due to lack of professional networks and mentors, this phenomenological qualitative study sought to understand, from the protégé perspective, how women develop the capacity to enter into mentoring relationships. Subjects in the study were 14 women participants in a mentoring conference sponsored by a statewide women's administrative organization. Conclusions from the study address ambivalence experienced by protégés in seeking out a mentor as well as implications for women's professional organizations seeking to develop strong mentoring cultures.

Introduction

Women and minorities traditionally struggle to gain access and entry into educational administration positions (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; Gupton & Slick, 1996). Reasons often cited as explanations for discrepancies between numbers of women in the teaching ranks and women in leadership positions are lack of networking, few positive role models, and inadequate sponsorship and mentoring among women (Blount, 1998; Gupton & Slick, 1996). In a study by Yonson (2004), women aspiring to school superintendencies identified the career barriers they had experienced. They included gender bias, perceptions that women are too emotional for top leadership, do not understand budgets, and are not strong managers. Lack of geographic mobility and a perception of the "glass ceiling" were also mentioned. Of significant importance were the lack of professional networks and lack of mentors as barriers.

About the Authors

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Both Linda and Jenny are past presidents of Illinois Women Administrators. We also want to acknowledge the contributions to this research project made by Jeanne Davis and Cynthia Clark.

Rhode (2003) stated, "A central problem for American women is the lack of consensus that there is a significant problem. Gender inequalities in leadership opportunities are pervasive; perceptions of inequality are not. A widespread assumption is that barriers have been coming down, women have been moving up, and equal treatment is an accomplished fact" (p. 6). In a study of accomplished Illinois women school leaders, in response to a direct question about whether gender affected their career opportunities, 7 responded in the affirmative, 4 reported no effect and 5 answered both yes and no (Lyman, Ashby, & Tripses, 2005). Finding mentors and access to informal networks of advice, contacts, and support is a common obstacle. Surveys of professional women reveal both perception and reality of exclusion from "boys clubs" or "old boys networks." The result is that many women remain out of the loop in career development (Rhode, 2003).

Evidence of women excluding other women is unfortunately available. The "Queen Bee" phenomenon sometimes operates: women who reach

positions of influence enjoy their status as one of the few females at the top thus taking no responsibility to assist less experienced women to reach their leadership potential (Rhode, 2003). Due to the pressures of working in androcentric cultures that do not recognize or support them, many women are ambivalent about helping other women professionally (Bell, 1995). In a study of barriers women face in entering administration, Shepard (2000) concluded that "women may be their own worst enemies" (p. 182). Having identified barriers, Shepard asserted that women must support other women to positions of school leadership. Lacking support from women already in leadership positions, aspiring women leaders likely will not assume positions in any great numbers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore ways in which women develop capacities to enter into and engage in mentoring relationships with more experienced leaders in education. The study grew out of a mentoring conference sponsored by Illinois Women Administrators (IWA) to encourage educational women leaders at all stages of their careers to engage in mentoring relationships. The mission of IWA is "to improve schools by networking and mentoring women educational leaders into positions of influence in school administration" (Tripses, 2004, p. 9).

Based on the results of a planning study distributed to IWA membership in Fall 2003, the IWA Executive Board organized a two-day conference on mentoring. The purpose of the conference was to provide a forum for aspiring and practicing women administrators to explore networking relationships and mentoring opportunities at different career stages. The conference, specified for women only, had 40 participants. Support and encouragement were offered through the conference to aspiring and practicing school administrators, administrators considering changing roles, administrators interested in mentoring other women, and women aspiring to teach in higher education either as adjuncts or in tenure track positions.

Literature on mentoring often focuses on the responsibilities and roles of mentors. The focus of this study was instead upon the protégé. Planners of the conference intended that participants would gain insights, information, and motivation to effectively seek out and engage in mentoring relationships. Data for the study were obtained by asking participants questions, during and after the mentoring conference, that would yield information about the women's awareness of their needs in a mentoring relationship, the qualities desired in a mentor (whether they were seeking professional skills, personal

qualities or both), strategies employed to engage in a mentoring relationship, and finally, a description of the relationship itself.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory

Using a feminist framework, we looked at several interrelated concerns from the perspective of the protégé. We were interested in learning how women engage in mentoring relationships, what barriers they might perceive, and differences between their stated intentions for entering into a mentoring relationship and actual outcomes of their mentoring relationship.

A feminist approach validates personal experience and recognizes marginal voices. Gardiner et al. (2000) define feminist tradition as follows:

> Feminist research validates multiple and diverse perspectives, in particular the values of examining these perspectives to clarify one's own beliefs and values, and for the pedagogical opportunities to help one to consider viewpoints of other individuals. Women learn from other women's voices and experiences. (p. 29)

Mentoring from the perspective of women in professional relationships then takes into consideration experience, gender differences where noted, power relationships and authority conflicts. Diverse perspectives are sought out and carefully considered (Gardiner et al., 2000).

Definition of Mentoring

For the purposes of this study, the following definition of mentoring was used. Mentoring is a personal learning partnership between a more experienced professional who acts as a guide, role model, coach, teacher, and/or sponsor and a less experienced professional. The mentor provides the protégé with knowledge, advice, challenge, counsel, and support in the protégé's pursuit of achieving professional and/or personal goals (Johnson, 2002; Portner, 2002; Zachary, 2000). A mentor is the keeper of selected wisdom valuable to the protégé (Sinetar, 1998) who embodies hopes, casts light on the way ahead, interprets obscure signs, warns of impending dangers, and points out unexpected insights (Daloz, 1999). Mentoring relationships are particularly important in the early stages of a career or during crucial turning points. Mentors manifest for protégés someone who has accomplished the goals to which they aspire, offering encouragement and support (Daloz, 1999).

The original Mentor was an Ithacan noble in Homer's Odyssey. A wise counselor to his friend Ulysses, Mentor was entrusted with the care,

education, and protection of Ulysses' son, Telemachus. The Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena, disguised as Mentor, spoke at critical times to Telemachus. She frequently intervened on Odysseus' or Telemachus' behalf, often in disguise and sometimes as Mentor, the prince's advisor. Mentor, then, was both male and female, mortal and immortal, an androgynous demi-god, wisdom personified, responsible for nourishing all aspects of Telemachus' life—intellectual, spiritual, social, and professional (Daloz, 1999; Galbraith & Cohen, 1995; Johnson, 2002; Gardiner et al., 2000; Mullen, 2005). From this epic, we learn that mentors transmit wisdom during important stages of transition. Myths, fairy tales, fantasy and children's stories abound with mentor figures: the spider woman in Native American lore, Gandalf in the Tolkien, Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web,* Shazam in the Captain Marvel comics, the little old lady in *Babar*, Tiresias in Greek legend, and the skin horse in *The Velveteen Rabbit.* Jung (as quoted in Daloz, 1999) explained that the archetype of mentor may be of either sex or both and represents "knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, cleverness, and intuition" (p. 17).

Women's Organizations and Mentoring

Mentoring can either maintain or break the status quo of organizations. Traditionally, access to mentoring relationships has been more available to selected males than to women, minorities and males not matching organizational leadership stereotypes. Mentoring practices have traditionally served to keep dominant white males in power. As an activity, mentoring has privileged a few and excluded many. Mentoring has been associated with power, privilege and social stratification (Gardiner et al., 2000).

Closely related to mentoring, networking is another type of relationship that serves to create, strengthen or change cultures. The term networking frequently refers to the "old boys' network," an invisible network of sponsorship by which experienced professionals groom young versions of themselves to leadership positions (Gardiner et al., 2000). Networks comprised of women can powerfully impact the culture and policy of organizations and professions. They provide women avenues to develop talents, build relationships, and support job equity (Wellington, 1999). Women administrators need support, encouragement, and a sense of being connected to others who understand the world in which they live (Irby & Brown, 1998). Levine (as cited by Irby & Brown, 1998) reported that women participating in a small informal peer support group of professional women educators at similar levels of management from different organizational contexts derived several benefits from their association in the group: (a) discovering a new way of looking at a problem, (b) benefiting from one

another's failures and successes, (c) serving as resources to help one another form new professional relationships, (d) providing professional contacts to offer and receive support, and (e) meeting other dynamic women educators in a wide range of management positions. Levine concluded that small support groups for women leaders can have a significant impact upon women's potential and be a "mechanism for broadening perspectives, generating alternative solutions to managerial problems, and enhancing professional and personal esteem." (Irby & Brown, 1998, p. 75).

A recognition of the importance of mentoring and networking to ensure that aspiring women overcome barriers to school leadership may be necessary but it is not always readily accepted. Accomplished women often resist the idea that they could benefit from support from a mentor or network. Quoting a subject in one of her studies on mentoring, Grogan (Brunner, Grogan, & Prince, 2004) cited one woman who said, "The last thing I want to do is go out there and ask for help. I can do it on my own and I'm very proud that I can do it on my own. I don't want to be thankful or grateful to anyone else" (p. 42). Looking back on her own career, Grogan said, "It never stopped me if there wasn't someone around to say, "You can do this." I just told people what I was going to do next. I didn't wait for someone to encourage me to do something" (p. 42). Providing a broader explanation of mentoring, Grogan concluded that mentoring can also be defined where the protégé initiates a mentoring relationship to acquire skills or knowledge needed to achieve career goals. She wrote, "Women are good at putting together their own mentors." Mendez Morse has a term for it. She called it "constructing a mentor." We need to help others. We need to encourage aspiring women to seek out assistance when needed with assurances that other women will encourage and aid them (Brunner et al., 2004).

Women in leadership need support and nurturance for their careers just as men do. They need to identify with those who are successful in administration. They need role models that reflect their values and beliefs about education, schools, and relationships. Women need mentors who believe in them and offer support and encouragement through tough situations. The careers of most school administrators are relatively lonely (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Women are especially isolated because they function in an androcentric culture. Edson (1995) conducted a ten-year longitudinal study on successful women administrators. She concluded "that despite all the obstacles for women trying to advance in a largely male arena, these female educators continue to be committed, resilient, and for the most part, successful" (p. 46). She reflected on how little is needed to encourage women in administration and recommended further study on the process of encouraging and supporting women professionals (Edson, 1995).

Mentoring Relationships

Mentoring relationships require active participation of both the mentor and the protégé. Women protégés must actively seek out mentors who demonstrate a willingness and the necessary expertise to guide them effectively. The possibility of identifying multiple mentors who can offer different kinds of leadership and competence is frequently overlooked even by women who seek out a mentor. Women protégés must also develop capabilities to realize when a relationship is no longer productive (Gardiner et al., 2000).

The protégé plays an active and critical role in mentoring relationships. The protégé shares full responsibility for setting the priorities, the learning, the resources, and also takes increasing responsibility to be self-directed. As the relationship evolves, the mentoring partners increasingly share responsibility for achievement of the goals of the protégé (Zachary, 2000). Portner (2002) listed several preconditions for protégés wishing to attain maximum benefits from a mentoring relationship. They are: recognition of the need to learn, confidence that mentoring relationships benefit one's career, and a genuine desire to strive for professional potential.

Mentorships are reciprocal collegial relationships that require professionalism and ethical behavior by both parties. Explicit preparation to clarify expectations and establish ground rules for the mentoring experience sets the stage for a productive learning experience (Johnson, 2002). Taking full responsibility for her own learning, the protégé recognizes the importance of effective communications skills, confidentiality issues, keeping commitments, actively seeking out and objectively processing feedback, establishing times and means of meeting, and always striving to become more independent. These are critical to the success of the relationship (Portner, 2002; Zachary, 2000).

Besides the traditional one-on-one mentor/protégé model, there is another construct to consider. Mentoring *mosaics*, a term coined by Mullen (2005), enables a protégé to access multiple mentors for learning, feedback, or support. Mentoring mosaics can take the form of networks, community, and family resources and are dependent upon the needs of the protégé.

> Within the mentoring mosaic, the individual taps the strengths and qualities of one's partners. Members interchange roles as mentors and protégés, sponsoring the learning of all parties through synergistic, flexible structure. This kind of network is indispensable for cultivating peer mentors, compensating for the dissatisfaction of traditional mentoring relations; and facilitating larger, team-oriented projects. (Mullen, 2005, p. 82)

Mentoring, Reflection, and the Relational Process
Mentoring is a relational process in which a mentor, who knows or has experienced something and transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, relationships, status) to a protégé, at an appropriate time and manner, so that it facilitates development or empowerment (Stanley & Clinton, 1992). The emphasis is on the relational process. In order for this process to unfold, mentors must help protégés tap into their inner lives through the act of reflection. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) defined reflection as:

> . . . a cycle of paying deliberate, analytical attention to one's own actions in relation to intentions—as if from an external observer's perspective—for the purpose of expanding one's own options and making decisions about improved ways of acting in the future, or in the midst of action itself. (p. 183)

Deliberately paying attention to one's own thoughts and actions leads to self-knowledge. Lambert (2003) identified self-knowledge and the ability to clarify one's core values as the chief requisite for developing individual leadership capacity. Hock (1996) further advised leaders: "If you look to lead, invest at least 40% of your time managing yourself—your ethics, character, principles, purpose, motivation, and conduct" (¶ 8). Reflection is a tool for managing self. It is an act of bringing one's ideas and thoughts into the conscious level for examination and deliberate evaluation. It is the way in which leaders can scrutinize their existing paradigms.

A mentoring relationship can be a catalyst for leaders to conduct regular and periodic personal audits of their beliefs, values, intentions, and actions in an intentional manner. A good mentor is a reflective coach, drawing out the protégé's thoughts and helping to bring unconscious musings to the conscious level for examination and discussion.

Mentors can help protégés "go to the balcony from the dance floor"—an apt metaphor used by Heifetz (1994) to describe the act of reflection. Going to the balcony is a mental activity of stepping back in the midst of action and asking "What's really going on here?" The process of gaining distance from the dance floor in our minds in order to analyze what is happening often reveals patterns not previously noticed. Taking a step back from the action with the assistance of a mentor can guide the protégé to a greater awareness of paradigms, assumptions, and the extent to which the protégé might be affecting the dance as a whole. Coming back to the dance floor from the balcony, one can develop the capacity to be increasingly proactive in determining the next course of action.

Mentors guide protégés to reflect on their espoused theories compared to their theories in use (Schön, 1983). Because individuals often are unable to see the messages contained in one's actions, seeking feedback from a mentor can aid in closing the gap between desired ways of behaving and the actual way of behaving. This kind of shared reflective activity results in "double-loop learning" described by Argyris (1994), where problems are not only detected, but the individual responsible for correcting them is able to think deeply to discover why the problem occurred and examine what to do with the underlying causes.

Ideally, mentors achieve objectivity by being somewhat removed either by experience or literally in another organization from the work/personal world of the protégé. Mentors assist the protégé in verbalizing and articulating the loose thoughts that swirl around in the head and help the protégé organize her options clearly enough to analyze them.

In summarizing the most important benefits of reflection and how they can assist in a mentoring relationship, we refer to the following list:

1. Reflection helps to align actions with core values.
2. Reflection provides new perspectives and alternative solutions to problems.
3. Reflection raises unconscious thoughts to the conscious level for examination.
4. Reflection helps integrate theories of effective leadership with day-to-day practice. (Hart, 1990)

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the ways in which women develop capacities to enter into and engage in mentoring relationships with more experienced school leaders. Using a phenomenological approach, the researchers designed the study to understand the essence of the phenomena around which women seek out a mentor (Morse & Richards, 2002). The three-stage data collection process sought to "focus on the ways that the life world—the world every individual takes for granted—is experienced by its members (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 489). Through initial surveys that gathered basic demographic information about the subjects of the study, in depth journal reflections written by the subjects during the mentoring conference and a follow-up survey eight months after the conference, the researchers sought to gain insight into the processes by which women engage in mentoring relationships.

Subjects in the qualitative study were participants of a two-day Mentoring and Networking conference sponsored by Illinois Women Administrators in June 2003. Forty women attended the conference including several experienced women administrators and college professors who participated as presenters because of their interest in mentoring other women in the profession. Participants in the conference included women aspiring to positions in school administration and practicing women administrators seeking to move up in administration or into college teaching positions. Participants in the conference were only considered subjects if they agreed to submit reflective journal entries responding to the investigative questions posed by the researchers.

A total of 14 subjects completed the journaling activity. Their roles at the time in education were as follows: one school superintendent, one combination superintendent/ principal, seven principals, three classroom teachers seeking administration, and two university professors. The school districts or universities where the subjects were employed represented a cross-section of small, rural towns, medium sized downstate Illinois communities, larger cities of near 100,000 population, and the densely populated urban Chicago area. Their short term and long term career goals represented a spectrum of aspirations. Some women focused on obtaining a first job as a principal. Others hoped to successfully continue in administration or to move up a level in school leadership. Women in doctoral programs were interested in completing the dissertation and moving into teaching at the university level. Several women currently teaching in higher education were interested in tenure and promotion issues.

The study consisted of data collection at three stages relative to the Mentoring Conference. Conference participants completed a survey prior to attending the conference that included demographic information, career goals, areas seen as strengths and areas the subjects wanted to develop. The second stage of data collection occurred at the conference where participants provided data through journal reflections. Subjects devoted an hour during the conference to journal their responses to specific prompts about mentoring and to reflect about entering into a mentoring relationship. The participants were aware that their reflective journaling would be copied to provide the qualitative data needed for this research project, but were assured that their personal identities would be kept anonymous through the use of number-coding of their journals. These data were copied for use by the researchers and the subjects kept their original journals. Reflection questions sought to probe the perceived benefits and risks of entering into a mentoring relationship and asked about any strategies the participants may be formulating to enter into a mentoring relationship. The final phase of data

collection was conducted six months after the conference to determine if subjects had entered into a mentoring relationship and if so, they were asked to describe the relationship. Subjects who had not engaged in a mentoring relationship were asked to write about intentions to engage in a relationship in the future and to describe any obstacles they may have encountered in entering into a mentoring relationship. The results appeared to yield honest, transparent sharing of their thoughts and feelings.

Results

Analysis of the responses revealed a wide range of general thoughts about engaging in a mentoring relationship. From those who had just been introduced to the possibility of seeking a mentor, there were responses such as "I like the idea, but feel resistant to setting up a formal structure;" "I rely more on networking than mentoring;" and "I am more used to processing things on my own—I need to remind myself to reach out." Some comments reflected a "head knowledge" of the importance of mentoring. Participants predicted that mentoring would be worthwhile, would help ease a woman's transition into a new administrative position, would help establish professional connections, and could result in reflection and unexpected learning.

Participants were asked to identify the needs they felt could be met from engaging in a mentoring relationship. Their responses can be clustered under two main themes: Personal Needs and Professional Needs.

Personal Needs

Participants identified many perceived personal benefits of being involved in a mentoring relationship. The researchers could almost "hear" a yearning for such a relationship in their journal entries. There were entries that spoke of the need for support and encouragement from a mentor, of having someone to share successes and failures with, and of having a confidante—"someone to share personal problems with." Participants identified the desire to be reflective and increase their self-awareness. They identified the need to have someone help them realize when they were making a mistake or stepping on a "land mine." Women wanted an honest critic to consider their ideas and frustrations, and help them gain a more realistic view or a new perspective on their personal situations. One participant spoke of needing someone to help her keep her focus when she was losing it. The strongest theme appeared to be the need to have a "safety net" relationship with someone who had already walked the road ahead. A very expressive subject summed up her need for this safety net by stating "I need someone to make the 'stupid' statements to,

someone who will tell me that I am professionally 'all wet' or that I am 'doing it right.'"

Professional Needs

The perceived professional benefits of a mentoring relationship were also recognized. Participants desired job-related advice from someone with a lot of expertise in administration. Augmenting their professional networks and reducing professional isolation were perceived as important. Participants mentioned that having a mentor would help them become more aware of their professional responsibilities and assist them in developing leadership skills.

Perceived Risks

The subjects expressed perceived risks in becoming involved in a mentoring relationship. The chief concern was the vulnerability that inevitably comes when you open up your life to another person. The women said, "I am somewhat afraid of engaging closely with someone over time and exposing my weaknesses" and "there is a fear that my mentor might use my weaknesses against me." Similar to those misgivings were fears that a mentor might breach a trust or break confidentiality. One woman expressed a similar trust issue in that she feared that a mentor might want to lead her in a direction she would not want/should not go. One subject shared her fear that her mentor would end up competing with her.

Women were sensitive about being successful in a mentoring relationship—the age-old "fear of failure" reared its ugly head. Comments such as "I might make a mistake;" "I might be too demanding of a mentor, expecting more than he or she can give;" "the mentor might be negative and critical;" and "I risk having a damaged relationship if the mentoring goes sour" were made by the subjects. There was also a fear that professional jealousies might arise out of a mentoring relationship or turn out to be a huge disappointment, thus causing the protégé to feel failure or rejection. A final concern expressed frequently was the time commitment required to be involved in a mentoring relationship.

Participants' Planned Strategies for Engaging In a Mentoring Relationship

We sought to prompt conference participants to act upon their new knowledge about mentoring by asking a final question: What plans or strategies might you employ to engage in a mentoring relationship? Subjects who journaled on this question shared musings that indicated plans to

implement both informal and formal strategies to engage in mentoring relationships.

Several women mentioned reflecting on professional and personal goals prior to contacting a mentor. Subjects who intended to seek out a mentor indicated they planned to use information shared by the presenters at the conference, including setting goals and establishing parameters with their mentors for the relationship such as timelines and schedules. One woman wrote that she planned to read the books on mentoring she purchased at the conference. In their journals, women reflected upon their need to maintain contact with women at the conference and to consider other professionals as possible mentors. Women expressed the need to proactively seek a mentor, even if it meant taking a risk and asking others to mentor them.

Evaluation of the Mentoring Conference

Based upon journal reflections, we concluded the conference provided the participants an avenue to explore the topic of mentoring in meaningful ways. Besides strongly citing specific speakers and their informative workshop sessions as being helpful, participants spoke of their appreciation for a book table of professional reading resources available for their purchase. The participants also cited the following:

1. The *informal networking* that took place throughout the conference was the most beneficial aspect of attendance.
2. The *stories and experiences shared* by other women in administration brought insight and inspiration to the participants.

These two findings have profound implications and should be further considered by professional organizations, university educational administration departments, and practicing school administrators to determine if women administrators are provided adequate opportunities for informal networking and sharing of stories.

Follow-Up Survey Results

A follow-up survey was mailed to study participants eight months after the Mentoring Conference. We wanted to know if the participants had engaged in a mentoring relationship in an intentional way, and if so, how they went about selecting their mentors. We asked them to describe the goals for the relationship, any unexpected challenges, successes, and their feelings about mentoring.

Twelve of the original 14 participants returned the surveys. Of those 12, five had engaged in a mentoring relationship. Seven participants had not,

citing reasons that included not having the time to foster such a relationship, not feeling the need at the present time, and being assigned to mentor someone else professionally. The following analysis focuses on the five participants who entered into a mentoring relationship after the Mentoring Conference.

The subjects selected their mentors in a variety of ways. Reputation as an accomplished administrator with knowledge and expertise was key for three of the five. An administrative intern selected a highly respected principal in her district. A young principal selected a department chair from a nearby community college as her mentor. This woman had previously interviewed her for a job at the college, which she did not get, but they stayed in contact and had many professional conversations through the years. A newly-hired superintendent was encouraged by her school board to use the mentoring services of a retired superintendent who was available for coaching. The board paid for this retired male superintendent to supervise the new female leader. A female university professor selected a peer who had fresh ideas and a newer approach to the work of educational leadership.

Two participants were less explicit in their reasons for selecting a particular mentor. One participant stated that her relationship with her mentor just "evolved over time," and never was really formalized. The fifth participant said she chose her mentor because "I liked her style."

Goals for the mentoring relationships varied. Two participants admitted that there were no goals established for the mentoring. They explained this by stating that the relationships were not formal with regularly scheduled meetings. They talked of being able to access their mentors on an "as needed" basis. Aspiring and new principals had goals of learning more about the specific roles and challenges of the position, as well as "seeing the big picture." The novice superintendent stated her goals as: wanting advice, but not a dictate on how to do her job, wanting a sounding board to bounce ideas off of, and wanting examples of what her mentor had seen as successful in his experiences. The college professor wanted to share ideas for scholarship and publication with her mentor, as well as having an editor for her writing.

The participants were unanimous in stating the biggest challenge in a mentoring relationship was finding time. With busy professional schedules, participants found that they often fell back on e-mails and phone calls to access their mentors. Those who overcame the time constraints found that successes centered on relational benefits, technical administrative assistance and support to make a career change. The feedback received by mentors appears to have been well received. None of the participants mentioned difficulty in this area.

Specific positive benefits of the mentoring relationship were mentioned. First of all, getting to know more about the mentor's personal life and struggles made the protégé's problems seem more manageable (mentioned by three participants). Second, technical help came from a mentor who helped a protégé update her resume and gave her tips on time management. Third, mentors gave good advice and served as a sounding board for the protégés. Finally, one mentor acted as an advocate to other professionals who did not know the protégé well.

All participants reported positive feelings about their mentoring relationships. Mentoring relationships proved to be beneficial in helping the protégés set goals, know how to "navigate the waters" of their current position, and to acquire new learning. However, several expressed shyness about entering into the relationship. One participant said,

> the idea of actively seeking a professional mentor made me nervous. I was afraid I was too new, too green, in too small of a school, and too rural to be able to establish a positive professional relationship. I also worried about taking time away from someone's very busy schedule if seeking the help of a currently employed superintendent.

Discussion

More than 50% of the original study participants did not engage in a formal mentoring relationship. The three reasons that emerged revolved around time and energy issues, lack of a feeling of urgency or need to seek a mentor, and the fact that informal or situation-specific mentoring was meeting one's needs at present. The time constraint was an issue that came out in the journaling experience as well. There seemed to be a perception that a formal mentoring relationship would take more time out of one's already busy schedule. Women participants expressed chagrin at being overcommitted. Several were already mentoring someone else.

An interesting finding emerged on the topic of the perceived risks involved in entering into a mentoring relationship. We found an incongruity between the long list of perceived risks and fears about engaging in a mentoring relationship at the beginning of the study and the actual citation of only two reasons for not seeking a mentor eight months later. There seemed to be an approach-avoidance conflict (Lewin, 1934) expressed by the women administrators in the study. Approach-avoidance conflict occurs when a person experiences tension due to simultaneously being attracted to and repulsed by the same goal. Through journal entries and follow-up surveys, women expressed ambivalence around expressed needs or desires for a mentor, along with fears about entering into such a relationship. Did these

fears actually paralyze many subjects and keep them from seeking a mentor? Could it be that the women were avoiding facing their real fears?

What did emerge from the data gathered from those who had acquired a mentor was that mentoring experiences take many forms. They form a mosaic of knowledge sharing coming from diverse sources. There were many types of mentors: a "hired" mentor who was a male mentoring a female; a woman not in K-12 education mentoring an elementary principal; a "mandatory" mentor during an administrative internship; a mentor at the same level of administration; a mentor in a higher level of administration; a fellow teaching mentor at a university, and several relationships that "evolved over time." All were reported as valuable.

Women administrators develop the capacity to enter into mentoring relationships in a variety of ways centered around three themes that emerged from the study: commitment to the relationship, initiative on the part of the protégé, and finally, understanding how mentoring works.

Commitment to the mentoring relationship involves first recognizing a need for another professional to guide the way. In order to develop a commitment that includes time and energies that could be devoted to other areas, women must anticipate the benefits of the relationship. Protégés who take the initiative to seek out a mentor may need to coach themselves first in order to develop the confidence to seek out someone perceived to be wiser and more experienced. There is risk involved in initiating a relationship that involves having the mentor decline the opportunity for whatever reason. Knowing oneself, including strengths and areas for growth, is another important aspect of taking initiative. Doing so heightens the likelihood of a relationship based on mutually developed goals for the relationship, which in turn increases the likelihood that the relationship will have benefits beyond a social level. The final theme, understanding of mentoring relationships, involves recognition that mentoring can take multiple forms. The relationship can be long or short term and will likely change over time. In addition, women may have many different mentors in their careers.

We were particularly interested in the differences reported by participants on their feelings about barriers to seeking out a mentoring relationship at the mentoring conference and eight months later. There is a need to understand if the time constraint mentioned after the conference actually masked other constraints such as fears about seeking out a mentor. If so, professional organizations such as Illinois Women Administrators can work to encourage women to overcome their fears about asking for a mentor, and for those who could be mentors to encourage possible protégés to establish a mentoring relationship with them.

Implications for Women School Leaders and Women's Organizations

Using the "old boys' network," aspiring male administrators may benefit from support mechanisms in the forms of mentoring and networking provided by experienced male administrators. Women may not be providing the same types of support for aspiring women school leaders. Aspiring women school leaders need to come to a better understanding of themselves, including recognizing internal conflicts about seeking out mentors, identifying strategies for engaging in mentoring relationships, and finally, persevering in the face of inequitable opportunities. Naming obstacles is the first step in overcoming them.

Women's organizations must take seriously evidence that women's organizations have much to learn from traditional men's practices of induction for aspiring males. Women have to become much more deliberate about teaching other women who aspire to leadership positions about ways to effectively engage in mentoring relationships. At the same time, there needs to be an understanding of the implications of failing to actively support inexperienced women school leaders. The issue runs deeper than finding time to devote to mentoring. Rather, it is a matter of mentors and protégés identifying priorities. "We need to help others. We need to say to our assistant principals and teachers, 'Don't wait for someone to come along and encourage you. You come and ask and we'll sit down with you'" (Brunner et al., 2004, p. 42). Women school leaders need to learn to make the most of mentoring relationships and to form a *new perception* of networking that is all about women supporting other women in accession to leadership. The rewards are waiting to be reaped.

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